

The Right to Freedom

The Bulletin of the Human Rights Centre "Viasna-96"



CHRONICLE

On December 10, the administration of the Lenin District of Babruisk refused to give a permission to the Babruisk branch of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee to stage a picket near the monument to the victims of political repressions, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. S. Baradauka, leader of the administration explained that the reason was that all the actions of that kind in Babruisk are permitted to be held at the stadium «Fandok». But they had not permitted to organise it there either.

On December 11, Vyachaslau Kozel, chairman of a primary organisation of the Free Trade Unions of metal workers at the Minsk Tractor Plant was beaten by the guards while attempting to enter the administration of MTP. He was seriously wounded in hand. He plans to appeal to the prosecutor's office.

On December 11, in Grodno there was a picket on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The participants of the picket were holding in their hands the slogans, on which there were written the articles from the Declaration. The representatives of the Belarusian Popular Front, Belarusian Social-Democratic Party and the Grodno branch of the Human Rights Centre of the public organisation «Ratusha» took part in it.

On December 15, the activists of the Belarusian association of young politicians (BAYP) organised a free of charge subscription for independent press among the workers of the Minsk Bearing Plant. They were standing near the through-passage of the end of the shift and were offering to subscribe for one of the independent issues at their choice. The workers responded to this initiative with enthusiasm.

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A WAY TO NOWHERE

**ON DECEMBER 25, THE PRESIDENTS
OF BELARUS AND RUSSIA SIGNED ONE MORE
DECLARATION ON BELARUSAN-RUSSIAN INTEGRATION.**

I believe, historians of the coming century will have time and capability to understand all that political confusion, which was going on around Belarusian-Russian integration first into the United Soviet of States and then into the United State and finally into one country at the end of the century. They will have the results of that rat race and will be able to evaluate all the participants. But there is one thing we know for sure at present: from the very beginning this idea had no future. Each country in the «process of integration» has its own goals – tactical or strategic ones – and no more. It is clear. Moreover it is clear that the Presidents and their comrades are the least worried

about their miserable peoples, weakened by the crisis and their beggarly situation.

The President of Belarus called the next pact of documents «on the further integration of our countries» the New Year present to the «related» peoples. And it does not matter that under a further inspection it turned out that «this present» does not oblige any of the countries, it changes nothing in their relations, but it achieved its aim: the advertising campaign, which was in the country before and after signing, made the people only for a moment forget about the everyday problems, about empty shelves, about the expansiveness and lack of money and give the people hope, that «Russia will help

us, Russia will buy our goods which are not wanted in the West».

The Belarusian can watch the Russian television and have a general idea about the state of things in the economy of their neighbour, they are familiar with the views of those politicians on «integration». The Russians do not watch the Belarusian television. How lucky they are (by the way the Russian channels do not reveal all the truth about Belarus either). Otherwise they would know who they are united with. They would see not only our front but our back as well. I do not mean that our Belarusian television features all the truth about our miserable living. Just the opposite. Judging by television, economic showings are growing, as well as the national welfare (but the deficit and lines at shops are growing as well). If the Russians recognised in the Belarusian television

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SPELLING HAS BEEN JUSTIFIED...

THE NEWSPAPER «NASHA NIVA» HAS WON THE TRIAL

In the Supreme Economic Court the sittings concerning the case of the newspaper «Nasha Niva», have been renewed beginning from December 14. As it is known the editorial staff of the newspaper had to dispute in the court the warning given by the National Committee on Press on May 29 for using the pre-reform Belarusian spelling (tarashkevitsa).

Judge, Iryna Pyatukhova asked the experts-linguists and they were of the same opinion that there is no such a notion as «generally accepted norms of the language in use», concerning the Belarusian language. As to other questions, the experts held different views. The part of the members of the commission believes that the usage of the spelling which existed in Belarus before 1933 is against the existing rules of the «Belarusian spelling». But three of the experts – A. Bulyka, G. Tsykhun and B. Plotnikau – had their own ideas. Their opinion is that «Nasha Niva» has not broken any norms of the lan-

guage, and the norms, introduced during Stalin's regime by the authorities by force, which can not be considered generally accepted (moreover the third part of Belarus was under Poland ruling. One more member of the commission professor Stsyatsko from Grodno failed to come to Minsk but he sent his written answer, which says that the decree of 1933 «On Changes in the Belarusian spelling» may be considered as a serious political interference in the process of the language development.

There were more than 200 letters of «Nasha Niva» readers enclosed to the case, in which the readers support the editorial staff's position. The representatives of the newspaper believe that this fact proves that the after-reform spelling can not be considered «generally accepted».

Even the delegates of the current Parliament were asked by the court. The letter, signed by G. Alyaxeenka, deputy chairman of the commission on human rights and international re-

lations of the House of Commons says that the «House» is not authorised to give explanations about the law on press. In addition Mr. Alyaxeenka says that he is going to suggest to the National Assembly to work out a number of new bills: about explanations of Article 6 of the law on Press and about changes in the Administrative Code

Mr. Lukashanets, chairman of the expert commission of the Academy of science, was also invited to one of the sittings in the court. Answering numerous questions, Mr. Lukashanets admitted, by joke that he felt as the accused. Though the chairman of the commission considers the norms of the present grammar to be generally accepted he did not deny the existence of the two variants of the Belarusian language. He did not assume responsibility to judge about the language of Mass Media and said that he is not authorised to do it. By the way, Mickail Pastukhou, juridical representative of «Nasha Niva», held the view that it is

impossible to regulate the language of independent press – and strict restrictions of the language can not exist either.

Syargei Dubavets, editor-in chief of «Nasha Niva», wanted the warning to be stopped at least up to the time our present legislative organ – the National Assembly – will work out the explanation of the law on press. But Alyaksandr Baranau, the representative of the National Committee on Press, insisted on the fact that this is not provided by the Law on Press. One more significant thing, Mr. Baranau refers to the repressive decree of the Sovnarkom of 1965 in spite of the fact there are some other decrees of the Government concerning the language.

On December 22, the court brought a verdict. It has become a sensation, but one could have expected: the warning of the National Committee on Press concerning the editorial staff of «Nasha Niva» has been found illegal, its functioning has been stopped, all the expenses connected with the lawsuit (more than 2 mln roubles) have to be covered by the defendant – the National Committee on Press. Beginning from that day the usage of «tarashkevitsa» has not considered to be illegal.

Yana ZHDANOVICH

A WAY TO NOWHERE

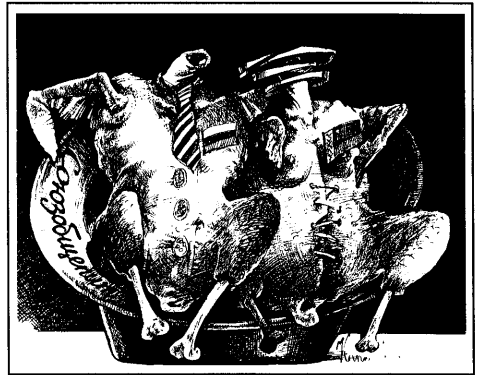
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the Soviet-Brezhnev one, perhaps most of them would not want to come back to lies. Moreover they would watch Belarusian news, which are called «everything about him and a little bit about weather», they would listen to the Belarusian President, who together with his electorate can be very generous in comparison with the foreign one (sometimes we are ashamed of him). They would realise what kind of person he is, dreadful and dangerous... Populist by nature, nothing can stop him and he has provided it and is proving it in Belarus. He does not care human rights and freedoms, for the whole nation.

Up to the recent time Boris Eltsin had been the least found guilty by the Belarusian opposition in the political speculations around the integration. Perhaps they could not do it because of his image of a respected and hardened democrat. They hoped that he would have understood Lukashenka's real intentions (the later doesn't hide them) and would have resisted his crazy

pressure and would have put him in his place. But after the July 17 the throne with the ill and old Eltsyn has become unstable. Moreover it has become clear that he will be able to become a president for the third time only in the «new country» but not in the present Russia. He decided to play on the Lukashenka's field. And he has lost. It is clear. Because he allowed the president of Belarus to declare that Eltsyn decided to rehabilitate himself for the USSR disintegration in Viskuly.

Nobody will question the fact that Belarusian-Russian integration is beneficial to those who had planned it: it has no advantage to the two peoples. It is essential to the presidents (first to the Belarusian one), in order lump the blame for its faults and lack of talent in the economy on the USSR disintegration and to give hope to the people who got accustomed to believe: «Have patience, we will unite and will live better...» This speculation is essential to Russian chauvinists-revanchists who consider Belarus together with the



former Soviet Republics to be the originally Russian land. It is essential to military men to put their nuclear weapons further to the West, it is essential to unsuccessful economists to get a trading way (why not join Poland as a continuation of the way, then Germany...), it is essential to communists-fascists and neo-Bolsheviks who use it to realise their ideological purposes ... and to many others, but not to the suffering peoples. Our fate is to be together. We live not on the isolated islands, not even across the road, but nearby. And we will

not get rid of this nearness, it is high time for everyone to build its own House, to rebuild its Motherland and to stop to rely on the neighbour. We should live today and should not hope for «a bright future». We are fed up: the Communists had been cheating us for more than 70 years...

This is a Universal truth, and it is no use to repeat it. The only sorrow is that so precious time for every person is being wasted for nothing, for a way to nowhere.

Andrey NALIVA

YURY KHADYKA

«THERE ARE NO SUCH SEVERE PUNISHMENTS ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD...»

Yury Khadyka, a famous member of the opposition, deputy chairman of the Belarusian Popular Front, was arrested and imprisoned to 10 days in administrative detention for organising and holding a meeting on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. After his imprisonment our journalist met him.

— Mr. Yury, after your arrest and hunger strike in 1996 the newspapers all over the world wrote about you and your companion V.Syuchyk. Did you feel somehow differently during your recent 10 days imprisonment?

— Surely, I met there some of my old acquaintances who said: «Yury Vichtaravich, do you remember last time ... Of course, they were militiamen. The regime of treatment of prisoners has become milder. A year and a half ago I was arrested together with some more people but we found ourselves in different cells. Now the wards call our cell «the cell for political prisoners», there were no homeless people in our cell. In the cells before-trial imprisonment, where there are 2 square metres per capita, homeless people — is the most unpleasant thing: dirty, with lice... first we were together with the participants of the meetings, only, then some people had done their time, they started to place people arrested for violating the laws of dealing with currency and small business. Mainly they were intelligent people. In this aspect, by comparison with the past, it has become a little bit easier to serve time. But in general there have been no changes: the same little space per capita, the toilet is in the cell, there is no decent light — the windows are so narrow and the lamps are so dim. It is hard to read. But on the other hand, nowadays it is permitted to get newspapers and magazines from outside — there was not such a thing before. Last time I was prohibited to take glasses this time I could do it.

So, to some extent the regime has improved. I would like to emphasise that journalists and politicians have contributed greatly to this cause. Mr. Shchukin — is a journalist and a politician at the same time. Thanks for his



Yury KHADYKA

efforts, every seven days you can wash in the shower-bath. There was not anything of that kind before. Owing to Shchukin, they distribute spoons with handles every other time, but not broken ones. The prisoners of our cell were not led out. Most of the prisoners here have a possibility to work for some hours a day. It is earlier to bear isolation in this way. We were not taken out to work. Besides, they used to give us warm food every other day. If there had not been any human rights organisations by the way there were no such organisations in 1996, we would have suffered a lot. This time we had a lot of parcels, all the people in the cell tasted them. It is, of course, contributed to the normal relations and enabled to bear isolation easier.

— It was not your first arrest. I heard that at the Soviet times you were in prison for political activities.

— I was charged for the first time in 1989 with the first «Chernobyl Rally» it was time at Moscow District Court they brought a rather funny verdict by comparison with the present ones, so the verdict was 2 months of forced labour and 20 per cent of my wages for the country's benefit. I had not been in prison, but they had been reckoning out 100 roubles monthly for the period of 2 months. The increase of punishments for administrative

wrong-doings — is a peculiar feature of Lukashenka's regime. Fines have become very large since 1997 after the «notorious» decree № 5 — at that time a fine had reached the size of the anywhere in the world. Formally, if a man crosses the street not in a proper place or has a misunderstanding with a militiaman, the militia has a right to detain him, it is an administrative punishment. After the clause, which prohibits the people who have ever been instituted criminal proceedings to participate in elections being stipulated in the Law of elections — it has become clear at once: this regime is scared of everything of any resistance, any differently minded people.

— Of course, officially it does not say that the participants of political actions are meant. That is why there are people who have ever been involved in any fights or had a car accident...

— ... or whom the offended wife gave out or people who exchanged dollars for roubles. Nonsense, because mainly against the common people, who find the exchange rate absurd and artificial and that is why they decide to exchange their money not in a bank, the whole campaign has been launched. There are even articles in newspapers quoting how much money has been confiscated from those people

by the militia. It was not enough that the country robbed them but it had to deprive them of the right to participate in elections. It has happened this year when the world celebrates the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and so much attention is paid to the protection of human rights.

— Mr. Yury, how many times have you been brought to court under Com-munists and Lukashenka's regime?

— All in all — about 10 times. While under the Soviet regime three times and every time the punishment had been smaller. The regime was weakening before our eyes. As compared to 1989 when one could be charged for any street actions, in 1990 these cases were stopped or people were given warnings. In 1991-1994 such actions were not persecuted at all. As to me, everything started on March 25, 1996. In general Lukashenka's regime started its repressions against differently minded people in 1995. It had become common at that time to follow somebody in cars, to beat them, to take them to police stations.

— Mr. Yury, you are not very young, and any imprisonment only ruins one's health. Maybe let the youth be in the first columns?..

— I do not want to be opposed to the youth. It is more difficult for the youth to bear isolation, insult of their dignity, which expects them behind the bars. Thanks to my age, even the guards respect me to some extent and they did not hit me, as it usually happens to young guys. I don't want to separate myself from the youth. It is my duty — to set an example for the youth, to teach them. I believe you've noticed that the aggressiveness which was between marchers and the militia in 1996 has practically vanished. I think it is the BPF great merit. I have explained to the militia that we are one nation, that among the demonstrators there are brothers and sisters and they should not treat them so severely as it was in the spring of 1996. We appealed to the women from the BPF to give flowers to the militiamen. The militia has become less violent. But we are on hard terms with special troops and other detachments of that kind, but it is the problem of the regime itself. Because such troops are made up for struggle with the opposition, the people are trained for that. I feel pity for those guys, who go crazy whenever they see demonstrators.

Interviewed by
Tatsyana SNITKO

SITUATION

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3 THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM

In Belarus where the confrontation of the opposition and the Government has acquired a very severe shape for more than 10 years, the authorities have used and sometimes successfully the attempts of compromising the most outstanding members of opposition. By the way, they resort to different means. The last victim of KGB activities is Pavel Karnazytsky, a recent student of the Department of Journalism of the Belarusian State University (BSU) and a present political emigrant. This 23 year old guy had here, in Belarus, a rather rich political «biography». He started his career as an activist of the Belarusian Popular Front, then he collaborated with ultra-right people from the party «Svoboda» (Freedom), with «sensible»

people from the party of «Common Sense», and finally he found the party which suited his convictions – a social-democratic organisation «Maladaya Gramada». They marked his capabilities: Pavel was appointed a chairman of the organisation – but soon after the elections there was a scandal. It was the result of the Karnazytsky's statement, saying that he had been compromised by collaboration with KGB. Soon after Pavel left for Kiev. According to the latest report in the newspaper, Igar Chyzh, KGB official and whom Pavel called his curator in the statement, committed suicide. Pavel Karnazytsky, who works for the social-democratic movement of Ukraine, agreed to answer some of your questions.

LOSS OF THE MOTHERLAND

MEANT FOR PAVEL KARNAZYTSKY

THE LOSS OF REPUTATION PROVOKED BY KGB

— *Pasha, I studied together with you at the Department of Journalism, we lived in the same hostel and I remember you saying sadly that you were likely to be somehow threatened by KGB. You started talking about it and your friends did not think that it was serious. Perhaps, you should have been more frank and persistent... will you tell me, when and how did you have any connections with KGB?*

— Everything started from the day when Angelina Rudenka, deputy dean of the Department of Journalism of the BSU, sent me to have a talk. She said that representatives of a youth organisation wanted to meet me and, to tell the truth I was greatly surprised, went out of her study, leaving us tkt-a-tkt. I believe you agree that it is nonsense when chairman of the Department had put her study at the second-year student's disposal for talks. My suspicions confirmed when I saw two people, who did not look like activists of a youth organisation. We were talking about my wild political activities in Minsk, earlier in my native town in Pastavy, and soon there would be a great action of the opposition («Chernobyl Rally-96»), and they were getting ready for that. At the end, I was told that I had to do what I did, but I had to co-ordinate my activities with «them». They emphasised that it would do no harm to anybody, just the opposite, it would be a great advantage to the members of opposition. In case I did not agree I would have problems at the Department. I had never been a bright student, but at the same time I had never had any serious troubles. They came on the following day. I had been reprimanded for playing truant but

as a matter of fact I had been playing truant no more than others. Obviously it happened because I had sent the KGB officials to the devil.

The situation repeated after the action on May 30, 1996, when I was arrested together with 2 my friends. I was sent for in the investigator's office or any other official's, where I saw Genadz Uglyanitsa and Igar Chyzh (they introduced themselves). Uglyanitsa and Chyzh promised that if I said «yes» to their proposal on collaboration, nobody at the University would know about my arrest and they would let me go immediately. They didn't thought that if they released me, without any explanations it would had been nonsense! Obviously I asked to show me to the cell and leave me in peace.

As they had promised it turned out that I hadn't been allowed to take exams. I asked radio «Svoboda» (Freedom) for help. Yuras Karmanau made a scandal report. Finally I was allowed to take exams but it was practically impossible because they had appointed several exams on one and the same day, without any notice. And the examiners were in a certain mood and they didn't try to hide it...

After being dropped out, Genadz Uglyanitsa had another reason: «You are a capable guy, you have to study and we can help but you don't want to...»

— *At that time you worked as journalist for the newspaper «Common Sense» and simultaneously was involved in political activities. In this connection, your «old friends» from KGB had new suggestions, hadn't they?*

— No, they hadn't. As earlier, no-

thing concrete. Just suggestions to «be friends». One Uglyanitsa called at the editorial office, and started to phone me and invited me to have beer at this or that bar. It looked like an old friend was thrusting himself on me. First I didn't take it seriously, because the worst thing happened: I had been dropped out. There was nothing to be afraid. I got worried when I came to my native village and my mother told me that some people had come on my behalf to take some papers. My mother didn't allow them to come in. But she got frightened.

I realised that there was something wrong. I asked famous politicians – Statkevich, Karavaichyk for advice. They were just shrugging their shoulders and told not to take it seriously and reject any contacts. I would do it but on December 10, 1996, after one of the actions of the opposition my friend – a guy from my former Department – disappeared. I started to look for him, but in vain. Then I made a mistake – I called Uglyanitsa and asked if they knew anything about him. I was told that they knew nothing. I thought that it was the end. But some time later on my way home I was hit down by a car and some guys after Uglyanitsa called did you understand? Soon after that I found out myself in Pryluki (a prison) – it was after the meeting on April 2, 1997. This time everything repeated only with a slight difference – they were threatening me to put in prison under a criminal article. I had nothing to loose and I refused. I was shown to the cell – but in a different one – I was together with criminals who were asked to give me a lesson – I think it is not necessary to define more precisely what it means. But the criminals



decided not to have any connections with shady affairs. They didn't manage to charge me under criminal article – this time again thanks to Yuras Karmatau and radio «Svaboda». Next time I had problems after the case with UNA-UNSO – was invited to «talks» to help find an underground printing-house, which used to be somewhere. But my lawyer Arsen Skarulis advised me not to go to any meetings until they sent an official document. By the way it hadn't been sent.

— Why didn't you appear in press and tell about the KGB persecution?

— I started thinking about leaving the country because Uglyanitsa and Chyzh had become more obtrusive. They told me that most of the famous politicians collaborated with them and threatened me with «black lists» in which there was my name as well. They told me that my consent would help me to get rid of problems and would help to make career. But the following happened. Ones in the street a car stopped near me. There were well-dressed men in it and I could hardly realise what was going on when I found myself in it together with them. Through dark windows I couldn't understand where we

were driving to and I realised that they brought me to a large building. I was got off the car and led to the basement. I was going downstairs. I was left in this basement for a certain period of time, then I was taken into a room and started to show a videotape on the treatment of the people who were in prison for rape. Later they explained that my friend, whom I had wanted to find with their help could experience the same – a seizure group would go to his room would «find» drugs and would tell the fellow prisoners why he had been sent to prison. Meanwhile through the walkie-talkie it was announced – where the car with cops was going, then it was approaching the hostel. I knew for sure that my friend bore no responsibility to drugs. But the psychological pressure was enormous. I don't know why I lost consciousness. I recovered the next day in the morning in the park of the 50th anniversary of the October. I hoped that all my troubles came to an end. In the evening while taking a shower I found on my body a spot after the injection. I decided that they had tried to recover consciousness in that way. I was sure that that time they had got nothing.

Moreover they don't bother me – up to the time I became a press-secretary

of the social-democratic party. They started to phone me all of a sudden, to meet me «by chance» in the street. They changed their attitude – I was shown the paper where it was written that I promised to collaborate with them. I recognised my handwriting. They promised to show that paper to my relatives, friends, and assured that I wouldn't be able to explain. I delayed my answer, I tried to plead not having any information apart from which I announce in press-releases. When I was chosen chairman of «Maladaya Gramada», it became impossible to deny. I had the only way out – to go to Statkevich and tell him everything. His answer was the following: «I expect you to be brave». I did everything I could – we summon an extra session, at which I gave up the post, pleading ill-health. I couldn't hide anything from my friends. At that time I could neither struggle against KGB, nor defend my reputation, because my mother was gravely ill, she was dying. Nothing meant more for me than her life. Meanwhile Statkevich appealed to KGB to explain why they interfered with the activities of the organisation. This appeal was ignored. Some people started to call me «KGB-member». I had nothing except for the open struggle. I had connections with social-democrats from Kiev and they know what had happened to me and promised to settle in Kiev. At that time we knew that at the next action of the opposition I would be seized. We did everything very quickly – in the morning I summoned my press-conference, some hours later I going to Moscow to change to Kiev.

— Then you settle in Kiev, didn't you?

— As my friend Mikola Pryvornikau says who is also exiled, here is a satiety, in Belarus there is a life. In fact, everything is left there, in Belarus.

— You can not come back because you are afraid of KGB persecution, aren't you?

— No, I'm not. It is personal matter. — I can't return, because my mother died not long ago... Besides there is no such a place in Belarus where I am expected. It is good that my friends don't forget me, phone me – though after some of them I have to call the ambulance: my heart is full of emotions. In case I had no calls, no letters, it would be unbearable.

— Pasha, may be you know that one of your «old friends» Igar Chyzh committed suicide...

— I hear that it happened when KGB was clearing their relations inside the organisation. I have never wished death to this man, like any other. If it is a suicide but not a murder I can understand him. After one of the contacts with Chyzh and Uglyanitsa I also tried to commit suicide. But the God had mercy: I had no «skills» to do it and now I remember of it with a certain shame...

Interviewed by
Tsina PALYNSKAYA

ECHO

The Bulletin of the Human Rights Centre "Viasna-96"

5 THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM

EVENTS FACTS COMMENTS

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On December 15, an old woman died, while standing in a line for eggs. Occurred in the shop «Ptushka» of the local poultry farm.

On December 16, the leader of the OSCE in Belarus Hans-George Veek paid a visit to the imprisoned delegates of the 13th Supreme Soviet Andrey Klimau and Uladzimir Kudzinau, as well as Alyaxey Shydousky, the Malady Front activist. The visits and meetings of that kind in prison are part of the private work of the consulting and Observing Group.

On December 17, Yuri Khadyka, deputy chairman of the BPF, and Ales Byalatsky, chairman of the Human Rights Centre «Viasna-96» were re-leased, after having served 10 days in administrative detention for organising an action on December 6, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. At 12 o'clock at the headquarters of the BPF Yuri Khadyka and Ales Byalatsky held a press-conference. Recent prisoners were talking about their struggle for human rights in prison. Yuri Khadyka and Ales Byalatsky wrote a statement which says: Convicts who are imprisoned before trial are kept in more awful conditions than prison. It means that prisoners are not able to have a walk. It results in the rise of different diseases. Such as: consumption, scab, allergy, claustrophobia, headache, short breath, weakening of supporting and motoring system, different nervous and mental diseases. The declarants emphasised that in this way their rights to health protection are violated. This statement was signed by all the people who are in cell №19. As a result of it on the following day the prisoners of that cell were led for a walk. Valery Shchukin wrote an application to the attention of the head of the prison to organise a picket in the yard against mice which are all over. The administration responded to this grotesque application in the most serious way: on the following day the medical service had mice trampled down. Yuri Khadyka and Ales Byalatsky



stressed at the press-conference, that they considered their arrest to be a natural continuation of struggle for human rights in Belarus.

On December 18, so-called Chamber of Commons of the National Assembly adopted a statement blaming the activities of the USA and Great Britain with regard to Iraq (rocket bombing). In this statement they demand to call upon the General Assembly to meet in a special session to consider the problem of armed conflict, which developed in the Republic of Iraq.

On December 18, there was the last day of plenary sittings of the 5th session of the Chamber of Commons of the National Assembly. At this session they adopted a law on «Elections to the local soviets in the Republic of Belarus». This law prohibits the persons who has been instituted criminal proceedings to take part in elections. This provision was proposed to be made under the President Lukashenka's advice, who in this way does not want his political opponents to take part in the elections. It is known, that almost all politicians of the opposition have been instituted criminal proceedings for participation in the actions of protest.

In the early morning on December 20, at the Brest custom-house Valyantsin Stefanovich, a member of the Human Rights centre «Viasna-96», had been confiscated literature with human rights contents. V.Stefanovich was going to a Polish town of Terespol to take part in the conference dedicated to the collaboration of youth orga-

nisations of Belarus, Poland and Ukraine. In V.Stefanovich's luggage there were bulletins of the Human Rights Centre «Viasna-96» «Right to Freedom» (in Belarusian and in English languages). The inspector of the custom-house, who had found the bulletins, started to cry: «Arrest him!» V.Stefanovich asked: «Do you think it is smuggling?» and was answered: «It is even worse!» As a result the custom-officers took the bulletins and explained that the literature of that kind could not be taken out of the country. V.Stefanovich was told that these bulletins would be examined to find out if there were any materials which «disregard the honour and dignity of the President of the Republic of Belarus and do harm to the sovereignty of the Republic». V.Stefanovich demanded a report to be made on confiscation, but the custom-officers refused to do it.

On December 19, the Belarusian Popular Front organised a number of pickets in Minsk, dedicated to one and the same problem – human rights in Belarus.

On December 22, there was a concluding sitting of the Supreme Economical Court at which the decision was made on suit of the newspaper «Nasha Niva». The conflict around the newspaper «Nasha Niva» started in June, 1998. At that time the National Committee on Press gave an official warning to the newspaper for using «tarashkevitsa» (this orthography was worked out by Branislau Tarashkevich and it was used in Belarus up to the reform of 1933, directed to russification). The editorial staff of «Nasha Niva» decided to

dispute the decision of the National Committee on Press at the Supreme economical Court. There were several linguistic examinations, which brought a conclusion that using a prerreform spelling is not against the law. On December 22 the court brought a verdict in favour of the editorial staff. Judge M.Pyatukhova nullified the warning of the National Committee on Press with regard to «Nasha Niva».

On December 22, at the faculty of International relations of the Belarusian State University there was a round table dedicated to the analysis concluding observations of the Committee on Human Rights for the 4th periodical Belarusian report on the realisation of the International Pact on the public and political rights. In this event took part the representatives of the UNO in Belarus, the representatives of the official authorities of the Republic (MFA, MIF, The General Prosecutor's office, Constitutional Court, the National Committee on Press and etc.) and the Belarusian Human rights organisations (Belarusian Association of Journalists, Belarusian Helsinki Committee, the Human Rights Centre «Viasna-96»). The representatives of the human rights organisations read out their reports in which they gave examples of numerous facts of violation of human rights in Belarus. But the official authorities had not prepared any reports. By this fact the authorities proved that they had nothing to say about the Committee on Human Rights' remarks.

On December 22, Valery Shchukin has served 15 days

in administrative detention, charged with participation in the Trade Unions protests on November 5. They were forced to release Valery Shchukin at 2 o'clock. But at 10 o'clock in the morning he was visited by the militia men who told him to go out. Shchukin answered that he would not go with them. Then they seized him and dragged outside, where they threw him in the snow. V.Shchukin was brought to the Central District Court to charge with the participation in the action on December 6 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. During the trial the militiamen broke into the Judge Anatol Barysenka's study and threw V.Shchukin on the floor. But the judge put off the trial on December 28.

On December 23, wives and children of Belarusian political prisoners wrote a letter to a famous Russian hockey player Pavel Bure. «Our children and husbands are in prison only for the fact that they had no fear to speak against Lukashenka. Mean-while you meet publicly with Belarusian President and by this fact you support the rude and unskilled leader, who drove the country to disdain and, as to us – to sorrow and tears, - says the letter, signed by Andrey Klimau's mother and his wife, Tatsyana, Alyaxey Shydousky's mother and Uladzimir Kudzinau's wife.

On December 23, a 16 year old student of the Centre of Professional Education of Partyzansky District, Stanislau Karashchanka was called to the local commission for minors. In the Commission Stanislau Karashchanka was told that he had no right to participate in meetings under 18 years have no right to speak against it.» Stanislau Kara-shchanka was warned for participation in the action on December 6 (under Article 167, Part 1 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus).

On December 28, on that day the activists of the public initiative «Charter'97» wrote an appeal to stage a festive picket at the corner of the streets Nyamiga and Ramanauskaya Slabada (with Father Frost and Snow-Maiden and presents from «Charter'97»). This picket was aimed at protecting human rights and supporting Belarusian political prisoners.

BEING EXILED TWICE

BELARUS HAS NOT BECOME A «FOSTER MOTHER» FOR STUDENTS FROM AFGHANISTAN

The problem of Afghanistan refugees – students from Afghanistan, who have come to study to the Soviet Union and had to stay in Belarus, arose after the Soviet troops had been brought out of Afghanistan.

Before that the Belarusian State University provided Afghanistan students with education, accommodation in the student's hostels, new friends and new life goals. At that time they considered that they would return home with diplomas and would work for the benefit of their country. But the fate decided differently: first the Soviet Union disintegrated, then Najibula's regime had been thrown down and as a result former Afghanistan students were left in Minsk without any hope to come back one day to their native country, where some of their relatives had been perished, or were missing, and in case they came home, the same fate would expect them there.

Muhammad Hussein came to Minsk in 1988. He studied at the department of Journalism, got his diploma. When Talibas came to power in Afghanistan he decided to stay here, in the country which had become his native home. Belarusian State University met Muhammad Hussein and people like him half-way (by the way, there are not so many immigrants from Afghanistan in Minsk) and allowed them to live in the students' hostels (obviously they paid more than students) after graduating from the University. But this summer the Afghans have faced with the problem of getting a political asylum in Belarus because they are not students any more. There arose necessity to register their residency in our country.

Muhammad Hussein appealed to the authorities with the same request as well. He explained the reversals of fortune in his life in the application for getting a political refuge.

On July 20, he got an answer, he got surprised: so short and laconic it was: «initial number 1346... Mr. Muhammad Hussein, the Commission for residency under the President of the Republic of Belarus informs you that your request for

getting a political refuge on the territory of Belarus and the city of Minsk can not be complied and you have to get independent visa and to leave our country in the period of one month».

There are no reasons, no explanations enclosed to this letter, except for the seal of the Minsk City Executive Committee. None of the officials called Muhammad Hussein for a personal audience. The other former students from Afghanistan got the letters of the same kind. Having got this letter, some of them threw it into the dustbin in despair. Muhammad Hussein keeps it – as the last present of the country which has become his Motherland for 10 years.

Many years have passed from the time when internationalism was highly praised in the former powerful Soviet country.

At schools pupils used to gather copybooks, clothes for children in Nicaragua, while Soviet fellows were perishing in the mountains in Afghanistan for incomprehensible interests of the same else's revolution. The fact that the youth from the third world was studying at the institutions of higher education was approved and the country really did everything possible to ensure foreign students with proper living conditions and assume responsibility for their fates. These students especially Afghans, who had lost all the connections with their Motherland during the war, established new connections, made new friends, started a new life. At a definite moment they realised that it would take a lot of time, maybe, it would last forever and started to make efforts to find not a temporal, but a permanent refuge. As Muhammad Hussein says they had no clues that one day our country would have decided to get rid of them. «It is more offensive – Muhammad says, - because my friends and me have never broken Belarusian laws».

Refusing to give the Afghans a political refuge, the authorities refer to the «public opinion» – they say, it is impossible to ensure our citizens with a decent life, and there also strange ones. But the former students from

Afghanistan ask nothing – neither jobs, flats nor money for existence. It is not a secret that practically all the Afghan community is involved in trading, applies for the different position in private commercial organisations in Belarus. They sell oil, macaroni and make their living themselves and even employ some Belarusian citizens. It is just in the same way immigrants from the third world exist all over the world – they ask practically nothing from the authorities, except for the right to walk freely along the streets, because in their countries they are deprived of it.

Muhammad Hussein says that nowadays it is absolutely difficult to walk in the city: the militiamen can check your documents 3 times in one and the same evening. Sometimes he was detained and brought to the local department of Internal Affairs for identification, where he was kept together with homeless people and criminals as long as his friends found him and came to release him and prove that he is an entirely legal person.

Muhammad has experienced «every day racism» when he was attempting to set up his own business on the legal ground. The officials on whose decision depended the whole matter (I mean to sign or give a seal) were openly demanded a bribe. As a result Muhammad Hussein lost hope in his attempts to over-persuade the authorities that he is not a villain, not a potential liar, but a common man, who is willing make his living honestly.

The word community has admitted the fact of genocide, which Taliban movement commit with respect to «kharaz» – a little minority, 58 thousands of its representatives have been wiped out for the last months. Hussein is a representative of this nationality. Nevertheless he can not hope anymore for a political asylum in Belarus.

Let's hope that he will find a piece in the free western world. But what a bitter idea of Belarus which has always been famous for its hospitality, this man will keep, who has been exiled twice in his life?

Ts.P.

ACCENTS

The Bulletin of the Human Rights Centre "Viasna-96"

7 THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM

A TRIP BEHIND BARS

BY ANDREY MELNIKAU

After dinner we wait for «throwing to our apartment.» Some of my quarantine-fellows dream of getting to the «big apartment», saying it is not dull there. But I don't have a chance to see any of my temporary cell-mates afterwards.

First, they take those, who are directed, to another building. Being a newcomer I am predicted to be sent to the first one and also advised to take white bread, two or three loaves of which we have, with me. But my mates don't take bread and neither do I.

I am the last to go. Behind the door I am forced to sign a document with a list of things which I supposedly have received. And actually I receive a mattress, blanket, towel and two sheets. It seems to me there was something else in the list but it is too late to clear it out.

Old Grandpa and I are guided to the far end of the second-floor corridor. Grandpa's cell is №31 and I'm told to go further. A turn, passing to another side of the corridor and a command: «Stand still! Cell №33»

In the new «apartment» tidiness, neatness and ... comfort immediately catch my eye. «The far part» (toilet) is hedged with a barrier that has got a door. A roll of toilet-paper is hooked to the pipe, there is also a toilet lid on the toilet bowl. Above the washbasin – a kind of a hand-made shelf with soap dishes and a box with toothbrushes and toothpaste. A little higher there is a couple of small mirrors, even higher – a hand-made calendar with dates, crossed by this date. To the left of the door next to the central heating battery («bayan») – a bedside table with a TV-set on it!

For me that is a really unexpected wonder. Later I acknowledge that first TV-sets appeared in the prison in 1994. Only the screen size was restricted – not more than 37sm. By the way, another thing allowed here is an electric razor. But there is only one wall outlet and various devices you can resort to in order to use electric appliances at a time are prohibited. Electricity is usually available only in «rush-hours»: an hour in the morning, an hour in the afternoon and four hours before the retreat. Of course, it creates certain problems and inconveniences, but for the sake of watching TV you can put up with them.

At the entrance a wet cloth is laid

(Continuation.
Beginning in №№ 15-23)

on the floor. I wipe my feet and greet.

The inhabitants – there are four – greet me back rather amiably. However, they suggest that I should put my mattress on the floor between the beds and «bayan». Having noticed my embarrassment they explain that it is the way everyone starts here, it's not just to make fun of me or to humiliate me. I believe them and, thanks God, I am not mistaken.



Generally, it is not worth being trustful behind bars, because it is not safe. «Don't be afraid» and «Don't trust anybody» are the axioms of prison life. Because not only the strongest but also the basest are winners here. You can be framed in an elementary way, especially if you are too trustful and franc.

We get acquainted. On the lower stages of the plank-bed – two retired colonels who are under their fifties. On the top – a banker and a customs officer. For all of them it is the first time they are here. One of the colonels, slim and long-haired, starts questioning me: just showing off. The other one, a little bald and a little plump, from time to time breaks in the conversation. The others keep silent watching with interest.

The «apartment» I've got to was almost fully isolated from the «prison movement»: it was a «blind alley». According to the «Senior» of the cell, as the long-haired colonel appointed himself, the room below our «apartment» is full of people whose task is to listen to the talks in the cell and to report everything they have heard to the prison authorities.

Our real neighbours are «little ones» from the cell №34. Sometimes they ask for cigarettes or tea using the prison means of exchanging information.

My hope to be released earlier doesn't leave me. It seems to me that, like in P. Sharamet's case, all the opposition press have reported about me and thousands of my supporters come out to the streets to struggle for my liberty. My cell-mates try to convince me that nobody is released from here in less than two months, but in vain. I still believe and my assurance passes to them. For some weeks they will hope to receive «rich parcels», a colour TV, radio set and other advantages and support from my friends in opposition. But they and I will have to endure a bad disappointment.

Shortly after my setting into the cell (in several hours) I am called out to interrogation. A cop casually searches my pockets and leads me downstairs. He leaves me in a «glass». There is a young fellow approximately of my age. He says he has been brought here from the «capeika» (the first zone which is considered «red» among prisoners – they make furniture there and people who serve their sentence there are cops and representatives of the state authorities). I notice a good watch with a metal bracelet on the fellow's hand. But according to my mates' words it is not allowed to have watches here and if cops see them they immediately take them away.

At last the «glass's» door opens and we go out. Except the familiar warrant officer, a smug tall blond man who is swinging something like a closed umbrella in the air meets us. I guess that is an electric shocker.

The warrant officer asks us usual questions looking into our personal files, then he hands them to the blond man. So, they are going to take us somewhere behind the prison's measures – this «ritual» is always held before the removal. The fellow and I are hand-cuffed and the blond man begins to advertise his electric shocker – what will happen to us if we fail to obey his instructions.

Later P. Sharamet recollects this KGB officer in his interview to the newspaper «Svaboda». He was swinging his shocker in front of him just in the same way. I don't think he intended to use it but, probably, the possession of such a «device» made him feel superior.

So, we are led out of the «glass» and put into a van. And here we go!
(to be continued)

The Right to Freedom. The Bulletin of the Human Rights Centre "Viasna-96".
Address: 220007, Minsk, p/b 88. E-mail: rights@v96.open.by Published twice a month
in Belarusian, English and Russian languages. Circulation 299 copies. Editor-in-Chief Ales BYALATSKY.

In this number pictures by A. Karpovich
and photos from the Centre
"Viasna-96" archives are used.